

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
January 13, 2026
Regular Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Mayor William Justice, Mayor Pro Tem Jeffrey Conaway, Commissioner Douglas Eckendorf, Commissioner Tamara Pieratti, Commissioner Tim Vannoy, and Commissioner Wayne Herbert.

Call to Order/Opening Prayer/Pledge

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm and Mayor Justice led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Citizens were offered an opportunity to address the Board regarding items listed on the agenda. No comments were given.

Adoption of Agenda and Consent Items

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, the consent items below and the agenda as amended to add board appointments and unappointments for the Board of Adjustment and TDA to the agenda was unanimously approved.

- December 9, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes
- December 10, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes
- December 10, 2025, Closed Session Minutes
- FY 26-27 Budget Schedule

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

Board Appointments

Town Clerk Alissa Fender reviewed that due to expiration of terms, board appointments were needed for the Planning Board, Tourism Development Authority (TDA), and the Historic Preservation Commission.

For the Planning Board, Clerk Fender shared that Mr. Rogers and Mrs. Hancock wished to be reappointed to their seats, while Mr. Vannoy's election to the Board of Commissioners created a vacancy. Seven applicants were interested in the vacant seat and interested applicant Laurent Meilleur introduced himself to the Board and expressed his appreciation for the board's consideration, noting his previous experience as both a commissioner and planning board member, which he had enjoyed.

On a motion by Commissioner Herbert, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, Mr. Rogers and Mrs. Hancock were reappointed to the Planning Board with unanimous approval.

After a paper ballot, Frank Tursi was selected for the vacant seat. On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, with unanimous approval, Frank Tursi was appointed to the vacant Planning Board seat.

For the TDA, Clerk Fender reviewed that with the amendment made to the agenda the board would need to address the unappointment for this board first. On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, and with unanimous approval, Stephen Overby was unappointed from the TDA on the recommendation of the TDA Chairman.

For TDA reappointments, Clerk Fender reviewed that three seats were up for reappointment and Ms. Thornley, Mr. Patterson, and Mr. Diehl were all interested in reappointment.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, Ms. Thornley, Mr. Patterson, and Mr. Diehl were reappointed to the TDA with unanimous approval.

For the newly created TDA vacancy, Clerk Fender shared that five applicants were interested in the vacant seat and interested applicant Kelley Brown came forward, introducing herself and shared she had been part of the Swansboro community for almost 11 years, working at a hotel as Director of Sales handling incoming groups and meetings. Ms. Brown detailed her involvement with various Swansboro committees, including the Military Affairs Committee and the Chamber of Commerce board. She also described her work supporting Swansboro at a National Travel and Tourism Week event on I-95, where she spent two days representing the town and bringing visitors from the interstate. She mentioned working with Anne Marie from the TDA and their plans to create a basket for email marketing to promote Swansboro events.

After a paper ballot, Leah Evans was selected for the vacant seat. On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, with unanimous approval, Leah Evans was appointed to the vacant TDA seat.

For the Historic Preservation Commission, Clerk Fender reviewed that there were three term expirations. Mrs. Kingery, Mrs. Ramsey, who both desired reappointment, and Mr. Seddon, had chosen not to seek reappointment for his alternate seat. There were no applicants on file for interested in serving on the Historic Preservation Commission at this time.

On a motion by Commissioner Pieratti, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, Mrs. Kingrey and Mrs. Ramsey were reappointed to the Historic Preservation Commission with unanimous approval.

Clerk Fender clarified that with Mr. Seddon's not choosing for reappointment the commission would now have two alternate vacancies total - one existing and one new.

For the Board of Adjustment, Clerk Fender reviewed that with the amendment made to the agenda the board would need to address the unappointment for this board first. Commissioner Herbert stated he wanted to remove two elected officials' spouses from the Board of Adjustment. He emphasized this was nothing personal or punitive, but rather intended to improve trust, confidence, and transparency in the business of Swansboro.

On a motion by Commissioner Herbert Seconded by Commissioner Vannoy, Tom Pieratti was unappointed from the Board of Adjustment. The motion carried 3:2.
Ayes: Herbert, Vannoy, Conaway
Noes: Pieratti, Eckendorf

Following this vote, Commissioner Herbert made a similar motion regarding another board member. Mayor Justice interjected, acknowledging this involved his wife and addressing both removals. He noted that Tom Pieratti had stepped up to serve the town when they were short on talent bank volunteers and had served well on two boards. He expressed it was unfortunate to see him unappointed, highlighting Mr. Pieratti's activity with Military Affairs and the Chamber of Commerce.

Regarding his wife, Mayor Justice stated she was a lady of very high integrity and a recipient of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the highest award achievable by a civilian in North Carolina. He expressed his disagreement with questioning any conflict.

Commissioner Herbert responded that he too had the utmost respect for both individuals, noting they serve on two other advisory boards where they are high-level contributors. He clarified there was no intent to remove them from those other boards and he absolutely thanked them for their service. He reiterated his belief that this action would improve public trust, confidence, and transparency for the town's business, especially given the Board of Adjustments assigned duties.

Commissioner Eckendorf asked a question about the Board of Adjustments' authority, specifically regarding their power to levy fines. He shared his personal experience appearing before the board during his house rehabilitation after Hurricane Florence, when his HOA complained about a rental storage unit in his driveway. He explained he

had to pay an \$800 fine based on the board's recommendation to the town manager. He wanted to understand the extent of their authority regarding fines and property matters.

Clerk Fender clarified that the Board of Adjustment heard appeals to administrative decisions. In Commissioner Eckendorf's case, the fine he paid were not enforced by the board but was required to initiate the appeal process, covering steps like advertisement. She explained that appeals heard by the Board of Adjustment do not go to the Board of Commissioners.

On a motion by Commissioner Herbert, seconded by Commissioner Vannoy, Elain Justice was unappointed from the Board of Adjustment. The motion carried 3:2.

Ayes: Herbert, Vannoy, Conaway

Noes: Pieratti, Eckendorf

With two vacancies now created on the Board of Adjustments, Clerk Fender reviewed that there were four applicants interested in the vacant seat.

After a paper ballot, for one vacant seat, Jeff Brooks was selected. On a motion by Commissioner Pieratti, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, with unanimous approval, Jeff Brooks was appointed to the vacant Board of Adjustment seat.

After another paper ballot, for the second vacant seat, Larry Philpott was selected. On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, with unanimous approval, Larry Philpott was appointed to the other vacant Board of Adjustment seat.

Business Non-Consent

Ward Farm Village Preliminary Plat Modification

Planner Rebecca Brehmer reviewed that Ward Farm, LLC was requesting an amendment to the preliminary plat that was previously approved for Ward Farm Village Subdivision, located on Deer Island Road located within Swansboro town limits and zoned R-8 SF. The original plat was approved in 2012 with 43 lots on 13.83 acres, with 20 lots already recorded and sold in Phases 1 and 2. The amendment requested adding lots 42-47 to the northeast side of Ward Road, where no lots were previously planned. Planner Brehmer noted this request was consistent with current zoning and had been recommended for approval by the Planning Board.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti the Ward Farm Subdivision Preliminary Plat Modification was unanimously approved.

Advisory Board Discussion/Direction

Town Manager Jon Barlow reviewed that two ad-hoc committees had been created by the board for review, the EOC Public Safety Building Land Acquisition Committee and the Pool Committee.

Regarding the EOC Committee, Manager Barlow explained it was created in February of 2024 and last met in October 2024. Since the town recently completed the purchase of 5 acres of land on Main Street extension for \$1.3 million (from a \$3 million grant), for the future location of the EOC/Public Safety Building, the committee's purpose had been fulfilled. He recommended dissolving it.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, and with unanimous approval EOC/PSB Land Acquisition Committee would be dissolved with a formal resolution at the next board meeting.

Regarding the Pool Committee, Manager Barlow shared that they had completed a survey about a potential pool in Swansboro and collected data. The committee chair, Matthew Prane, would like to present/review the results at an upcoming meeting.

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, it was unanimously approved to continue the Pool Committee until they could present their survey results.

Future Agenda Topics

Future agenda items were shared for visibility and comments. In addition, an opportunity was provided for the board to introduce items of interest and subsequent direction for placement on future agendas. The following items were addressed:

- Recognition of Kristen Newbold, a high school student invited to sing at Carnegie Hall

Public Comment

Citizens were offered an opportunity to address the Board for no more than five minutes regarding items not listed on the agenda. No comments were made.

Manager's Comments

Town Manager Jon Barlow provided updates on ongoing projects:

- Sidewalk project: Surveys for five priority areas were finished, and engineering/design work was 80% complete, with expected completion by week's end. Only \$100,000 in SKIFF funds were available, so the Board must prioritize the projects, as costs will exceed this amount.

- Main Street dock replacement: A \$170,000 grant was received from Coastal Management, requiring a major CAMA permit, which was underway. The grant covers 75% of costs, with the town responsible for approximately \$35,000.
- Visitor Center/Transient Boater Facility: Public Works was repainting the building. Plans for redesign include transient boater amenities. With an engineering firm handling floor plan changes, the remaining \$56,000 budget (\$30,000 from Swansboro TDA and \$26,000 from town funds) may not cover the expanded project, and could need further funding.

Board Comments

Commissioner Vannoy expressed gratitude to Mrs. Justice, Mr. Pieratti, and all volunteers for their service to the town, welcoming newly appointed and reappointed board members. He noted the boards' challenges but was encouraged to see increased volunteer participation compared to past difficulties, especially for the Planning Board. Commissioner Vannoy shared that he had attended the Police & Fire Departments Christmas party, where he was impressed by the team's high morale and the recognition given to police officers, including an officer injured during an arrest, and thanked the chiefs for their commendable work.

Commissioner Eckendorf thanked attendees and expressed his satisfaction with ongoing sidewalk improvements—one of his key priorities since joining the board—while also acknowledging recent enhancements at the visitor center and Main Street dock and praising Manager Barlow and staff for their holiday work. He looked ahead to the February Pool Commission report, welcomed new board members, emphasized communication and inclusiveness amid recent challenging discussions, reaffirmed priorities like safety and infrastructure, and closed with warm well-wishes.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway noted the long-standing challenge of getting residents to participate on advisory boards, explaining that limited volunteerism has required individuals like Tom Pieratti to serve on multiple boards, even though three of the sixteen people in the talent bank already hold advisory positions. He expressed his preference to avoid duplicate service to broaden engagement—except for the Historic Preservation representative who must serve on both the Historic Board and Planning Board—and encouraged residents, especially those in the ETJ, to apply through the town's online talent bank form.

Commissioner Wayne Herbert expressed gratitude to attendees, stressing the importance of their input for the town's progress. He commended the town staff, particularly Rebecca, Alissa, and Chief Randall, for their professional and timely responses to his many inquiries over the past month. Commissioner Herbert also appreciated the

advisory board members for their contributions, acknowledging the talent and dedication evident in their work. He looked forward to engaging further with these boards. Additionally, he congratulated Swansboro High School teacher Mr. Casey Justice on his accolades, including Onslow County Teacher of the Year and Southeast North Carolina region teacher of the year.

Commissioner Pieratti expressed her gratitude to town staff across all departments—including fire, police, parks and recreation, and town hall. She thanked Elaine Justice and her husband for their service, and voiced concern that removing board members sends a discouraging message to volunteers and closed by recognizing Manager Barlow’s continued efforts.

Mayor Justice closed by praising the town staff—including the town manager, attorney, and all departments—for their diligent work. He reported meeting with Representative Wyatt Gable about funding opportunities, noting about \$1.7 million remaining from a land acquisition grant, and shared Senator Michael Lazzara’s support for the public safety facility. Mayor Justice also mentioned area resident, Jim Hamrick, for his donation of historical artifacts, his longleaf pine restoration efforts, and his role in firefighter training. He updated the board on the restructuring of JOED, ongoing project work, and infrastructure efforts through JUMPO, noting that major road-funding availability is not expected until 2033.

Adjournment

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Vannoy, the meeting adjourned at 7:07 pm.